

29 May 2013

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) strongly discourages U.S. Operators and airmen from flying to, from, or over the Syrian Arab Republic. The ongoing armed conflict has created a serious risk to the safety of international civil flights operating within the Damascus flight information region (FIR).

Some States, based on reports originating from their operators, have informed ICAO that incidents have recently taken place involving civil aircraft transiting the Damascus FIR. Such incidents include situations where civil aircraft unexpectedly found themselves in close proximity to munitions and missile firings. On 29 April 2013, a Russian air carrier transiting Syrian airspace reported missiles detonating near the aircraft while operating at approximately FL320, but the event has not been confirmed. In addition, unsubstantiated reports in the public media suggest that munitions firings have been directed at aircraft during final approach and take-off. ICAO has advised that many international operators have already taken the decision, based on their assessments of the level of risk, to circumnavigate the Damascus FIR, availing themselves of alternate routings in neighboring FIRs.

The security situation in Syria remains volatile and unpredictable throughout the country. No part of Syria should be considered immune from violence. Syrian opposition elements have warned air carriers against providing service to Syria. On 7 December 2012, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) warned air carriers not to fly to Damascus International Airport, because the FSA considers the airport a "legitimate target." During late November, opposition elements reportedly fired mortars at the runways at Damascus International Airport. The fighting near the airport in the capital prompted foreign air carriers to cancel service. In addition, videos released on the Internet by Syrian opposition elements demonstrate successful engagements of Syrian military aircraft by both Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) and anti-aircraft artillery, which has significantly increased the threat to low flying aircraft. In January, a video released by anti-U.S. extremists from the al-Nusrah Front shows militants who had overrun a strategic weapons storage area standing in front of two captured SA-5 missiles.

While the warning from the FSA specifies Damascus International Airport, fighting is widespread throughout the country, and aircraft have been shot down in areas outside of the capital. Due to this ongoing military activity, U.S. operators and airmen should avoid operating in the Damascus FIR (OSDI). Any U. S. operator or airman still intending to operate into, out of, or over Syria must obtain current threat information, comply with all applicable FAA regulations and operations specifications or authorizations, and provide advance notice to the FAA at aeo-citewatch@faa.gov with specific flight details. Additionally, U.S. operators must report security incidents to the FAA at +1 202-493-5833 or +1 202-267-3333.